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Architecture.

AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS.

Meeting of May 4th.—The Committee appointed to furnish the new rooms of the Institute reported progress.

A Committee on Models and Drawings was appointed by the Chair.

Mr. Detlef Lienau then read the following paper:

ON ROMANTIC AND CLASSIC ARCHITECTURE.

The word "romantic" is a term often used in relation to Art by modern continental writers. Its explanation may be found most easily by showing the true and the false relation of the terms romantic and classic to successive periods of Art development.

For, following the history of the progress of Art, and particularly of architecture, which has been called, so happily, by one of the greatest modern writers, "the King-Art," we find periods where, so to speak, the human mind, reposes on its laurels—where the devotee to Art seems so far lost in admiration of the achievements of a former period, that he actually becomes unable to create independently; he is only capable of composing works by using the ideas, systems, and forms of expression invented by preceding artists; works in which he strictly follows the traditions brought down to him from a former art. Works thus proceeding from an inspiration excited by old forms and ideas is what is called *classic Art*.

Romantic Art is understood to be just the opposite; it invents, it creates new ideas, new systems, and expresses these ideas through new forms and new modes of construction. With the continually changing requirements of human society, with the progress of civilization, it advances step by step; romantic architecture creates new structures, entirely adapted to the purposes for which they are intended, adapted to the climate of the country in which they are erected, and out of materials supplied by the locality; it gives to the materials the forms most expressive of their nature and the most expressive of the degree of perfection of *taste* and mechanical skill of the time; in short, structures reflecting like a mirror the people, the country, the climate, and the wants of the times for which they are erected.

Not so with classic architecture, which had already been adapted to the different requirements of human society, different countries, and different times, as a whole system created for other purposes, another country and climate, and for a preceding age. While the feelings and emotions of living active humanity are truly and simply expressed in romantic Art, classic Art only pretends to express them by mimicking what has been said and felt before.

Such periods, when taste alternated between classic and romantic architecture, will be found repeating themselves in the history of our Art. In order to illustrate this, let us rapidly follow the historical progress of architecture.

Setting aside the first manifestations of Art by nations not fully arrived at a perfection of civilization, we find in Egypt an art which, for its time, is entirely romantic. Temples, palaces, and tombs of gigantic size, the remains of this art, have been preserved down to our time, and they exhibit a series of bold monumental conceptions of a grandeur never since equalled. Taking their temples for an example of art that expresses most conclusively the state of advancement of the mind of this people, we find their oldest ones either entirely cut in the rock

in the side of a mountain, with a façade on the surface of the same, or cut half in the rock, with a large area in front, surrounded by porticoes, and having a monumental gateway, or else entirely built on a plain. The beginning of their art may be found in those parts of the temples cut in the rock, from which they afterwards derived forms for the structures built on the plain. These rock-hewn temples were simply large chambers cut in the lime-stone, divided into nave, aisles, and sanctuary, by walls and pillars, which were left standing to support the mass of the mountain overhead. The façade, the front of the mountain, was decorated by huge figures of their gods, in a sitting posture, some of which measure over eighty feet in height. The temples built on a plain are entered by a monumental gateway, always flanked with obelisks bearing the records of the building of the temple in hieroglyphics; passing through this gateway, the visitor enters an area surrounded by porticoes, whence a smaller gate leads into the *pronaos*, behind which comes the *naos*, and finally the sanctuary; some smaller chambers and passageways complete the structures, which are surrounded by a high wall. Sphinxes of stupendous size often formed an avenue through which the temple was approached. The construction of these buildings was very simple; they eminently express the enormous size of the stones of which they were built. The walls were very broad at the bottom, tapering off considerably towards the summit. The porticoes were formed by huge round pillars, with capitals of the shape of an inverted bell, supporting a plain architrave, and a cornice composed of a large cove and broad fillet, without frieze. The columns and capitals were decorated with the foliage and flowers of the lotus, the nymphææ, the palm tree, and other indigenous plants; the architraves, cornice, and the walls with hieroglyphics and symbolic figures, and the whole of the structure was chromatically painted. The architraves and walls supported enormous flat stones, forming, at the same time, a ceiling for the structure below, and a platform above.

Egyptian architecture is a highly monumental one; it is entirely adapted to the country and to the climate, and is expressive of the materials used, which were of such size and strength, that architects were naturally led to a mode of construction at once the simplest and the most durable; not an architecture that needs to be scrutinized and examined in its immediate locality, but of proportions so gigantic that over the vast plains of that country it could be seen and understood at a distance of miles.

But to fully understand the art of the Egyptians, one must go back to the time of the Pharaohs, and enter with the crowd of worshippers through the gateway of a temple decorated with gay flags, through the area and *pronaos* filled with people, into the temple, properly so called; there the impression made by the structure upon the mind of the visitor, will be found such as was intended by its originators. The lack of light and air, the gloomy decoration of the walls and pillars, the gigantic figures of their gods and idols, either cut in bas-relief on the pillars, or else in alto-relief, standing and supporting the ceiling or mountains overhead, as the case may be, and forming an alley, at the end of which the idol, the god of the place, is by fantastic light brought to view far off in the sanctuary, all the remainder of the temple dimly lighted, and the crowd of worshippers left in gloom and darkness; all this formed a scene fully expressive of that religion which struck terror and awe into the very soul of the people, and subjected it to the iron will of their priests and their kings.

Progress was impossible with such a system of religion; Art being subject to the will of the theocracy, the artists were its slaves, and it was the policy of the priests to keep the people always in the same state of servitude. We find, therefore, that after arriving at the state of perfection in which we now see their oldest monuments, they suddenly stopped all improvement in their art, and their later works are mere compositions, that is to say, imitations of those erected centuries before, so much so, that it is easier to determine the age of a structure of Egyptian art by the thickness of the mud which the Nile has periodically deposited at its base, than by the architecture or style of the building. What must have been the feelings of the artist of those times, who was forever kept in subjection to the dictation of this stern, inexorable priesthood, and whose highest flight of imagination was cut off remorselessly in the bud, before it had time to be matured? This can hardly be understood in our times, where perfect liberty in matters of art is considered quite natural.

But our next consideration must be, who brought on this liberty—who fought the battle of enfranchisement in matters of art? Long after the Egyptian art had arrived at the state of perfection beyond which it was not destined to advance, there began to be developed an art in another country under more favorable circumstances, which soon excelled all that had been achieved before, and which has not been surpassed in real artistic merit by any works that have been since produced.

The Greek nation, composed, as it was, out of small states, under a federative government, was the first of all nations to develop in its bosom that democratic liberty so necessary to destroy the bondage in which humanity had been held before by a despotic priesthood, and at the same time to free Art from the restraining and enervating servile influences under which it had been kept in its infancy. In the hands of the Greeks, Art soon progressed and improved, till under Pericles it attained the highest point of excellence. While the Egyptian art might be called classic to the Greek, the Grecian art was a romantic art; it was highly creative, adapted to the country and climate, and expressive of the materials which were used for their works. Their buildings are so fully in harmony with the formations of the locality, that it may be said that they complete its landscape; and besides all this, they were of forms of such beauty as have never since been surpassed or equalled. And still their forms and their whole system of architecture were so simple, their mode of construction so easily comprehended, that one cannot help asking the question, what is this beauty, what are the principles, and what is the law which regulates their art? The answer must be sought in the truthfulness with which their structures expressed the immutable laws of nature. Their structures, so to speak, grew naturally out of the soil on which they stood, making, through their broad base, a solid body with the rock, on which and out of which they were built; the forms given to each part of the superstructure were such as to be invariably natural to the material out of which it was made, and such as to express forcibly the *nature of the service* for which it was intended. For example, let us take the Doric column; its form is circular, broad at the base, and with a gentle decrease of diameter, tapers towards the summit, at once suggesting the idea of stability and strength; its adornment consists in the fluting of the shaft, multiplying to the eye the number of the columns when viewed in a row, and at the same time making them appear lighter and less substantial, hence producing that exquisite pleasure to the mind of a great effect

achieved through seemingly small means. The column at the summit swells gently out into the capital; the fluting ceases just below the capital, because the latter has a distinct function from the column proper, and is the intermediate member between a vertical support, the column, and a horizontal weight, the architrave. The architrave is decorated simply with a label moulding, shielding the parts below from the weather; its height is just such as required by the laws of stability, and hence its strength is nowhere lessened by decoration. Above the architrave the triglyphs are a continuation of the vertical supports, and have the fluting as their natural decoration; the metopes are no integral part of the structure, and sometimes they are entirely left out, as they are a mere filling-in of the spaces left by the more necessary parts of the structure; their decoration, therefore, is left to the *fancy* of the artist. Here we find those exquisite pieces of sculpture which are the delight and the study of the artist of every time and every school. The cornice immediately over the triglyphs crowns the structure; its form is altogether to the purpose for which it is intended; its deeply undercut label-moulding and fascia shed the water freely, and preserve the building underneath. The pediment or gable suggests a natural termination to the structure expressive of the roof which covers it. The tympanum is filled with sculptures in most instances. The tiles of the roof on each side of the structure are expressed over the cornice by antifixes and heads of animals, which throw the water from the roof. It will have been remarked how all the integral parts of the structure have a decoration, inspired neither by the animal nor vegetable kingdom, but entirely inspired by the nature of the stone or marble out of which the structure is composed, and it is in the invention of these forms that the Grecian architecture is so sublime—forms not to be found in animate nature, but deduced on philosophic principles from the substance and qualities of a material which has no given form in nature. It is to see such forms created by human genius, and brought to a perfection of beauty, that the mind most rejoices. This is the secret of the delight Grecian architecture produces. Those structures of small size, which appear to be so very plain and unostentatious, are the very gems of art, and the happiest efforts of ancient architects.

(To be continued.)

By order,

R. M. HUNT,
Secretary.

SONNET.

ALL beautiful things bring sadness, nor alone
Music, of which that wisest poet spake;
Because in us keen longings they awake,
After the good for which we pine and groan,
From which exiled we make perpetual moan
Till once again we may our spirits slake
At those clear streams, which man did first forsake,
When he would dig for fountains of his own.
All beauty makes us sad; yet not in vain—
For who would be ungracious to refuse,
Or not to use, this sadness without pain,
Whether it flows upon us from the hues
Of sunset, from the time of stars and dews,
From the clear skies, or waters pure of stain.

R. C. TRENCH.

* "I am never merry when I hear sweet music."

SHAKESPEARE.